

FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
COURSE OUTLINE

**ENGLISH 366, Lec 1**

Fall/Winter, 2014-2015

**COURSE TITLE: FICTION WRITING I**

Instructor: A. van Herk

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 15:00 – 16:00, Wednesdays, 16:00 – 18:00

Homepage/course website: <http://english.ucalgary.ca/profiles/aritha-van-herk>

**I. Course description:**

English 366 is concerned with the basic practice and theory of writing fiction, with emphasis on the building blocks of narrative. Although many students are eager to jump into writing longer works, this course enables developing writers to engage with manageable aspects of fiction writing and to apply those skills within larger contexts and to longer works. This is a foundational class, but flexible in its appreciation of students' multiple creative approaches.

Students are expected to read and to write a great deal and should be prepared for intensive, steady, and ongoing work. The course is conducted as a workshop; this workshop format does not imply group work, but all-class participation under my direction. Students must circulate material a week before it is discussed in class, and students are expected to come to class prepared with constructive criticism and relevant readerly responses to their colleagues' work and to the assigned readings. This class demands that each student read hundreds of pages—so be prepared!

At the beginning of the year, students will complete a number of short assignments, which approach various elements of fiction. Over the year, students are required to write two complete short stories to be workshopped in class, one in the first term and two in the second term. A third story, which will not be workshopped, is the capstone assignment at the end of the year. Each short story should be at least eight pages long but quality, not length, is the key evaluative consideration.

Each student is required to critique and to edit his/her colleagues' work with care and in some detail, providing two copies of a one-paragraph double-spaced written commentary for each story critiqued (one for Professor van Herk and one for the student whose work is being discussed). Students should also come to class armed with constructive criticism, and prepared, with eloquence and wit and in a positive spirit, to discuss their colleagues' writing.

We will be working with the text you have been asked to purchase, but will make reference to multiple other literary works. Students are expected to come to class having read assigned material, and prepared

to discuss this material.

## **II. Pedagogy, workload, methods of evaluation:**

This class will be conducted primarily as a workshop, with students handing in writing on a regular basis. Students are expected to write a great deal, to read published work as well as their classmates' writing with care, and to come to class prepared to discuss this writing with constructive, informed, and intelligent criticism. Grades will be based on fiction writing, ability to critique, some writing exercises, and in class participation. There is NO final exam in this course.

## **III. Texts and readings:**

*The Art and Craft of Fiction: A Writer's Guide*, by Michael Kardos. Bedford/Saint Martin's, 2012.  
This book is available in the bookstore, and you can rent this book virtually.

## **IV. Assignments and Evaluation:**

Students will be graded on their writing, on writing exercises, on reading reviews, and on class participation. Participation and critical acumen (including literary range and historical awareness) will be evaluated as well.

Constraints: Students are asked to resist handing in genre writing, meaning fan fiction, crime, zombie, fantasy, horror, romance, science fiction or inspirational writing. This is a course in literary writing, and replicating the genre conventions of popular forms will not stretch your literary muscles.

### **Grades and Assignments**

#### **FIRST TERM**

**5 short assignments, each of which apprehends a different element of fiction, of 1-2 pages each**

**1 short story, to be distributed and critiqued by the class**

#### **SECOND TERM**

**2 short stories, to be distributed and critiqued by the class**

**1 final well-crafted capstone story to be submitted to Professor van Herk by the April due date**

### **Percentage Breakdown:**

Each short story is worth 15% =	60%
Each short assignment is worth 4% =	20%
Class participation =	10%
(based on oral participation and preparation throughout year)	
Critiquing and critical acumen =	10%
(based on students' written critiques of colleagues' work and reading Reviews, one each term)	

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100%

**ALL** assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

There is **NO** final exam in this course.

### **Grading:**

Assigning grades for creative work is difficult, but this is an academic course, and must fulfill academic requirements. Your final grade will consist of an evaluation of all the work you perform and hand in. All assignments and stories are graded (using the letter system) and returned to you. You will be given a mid-session evaluation by the second week of January.

Your attendance and participation are part of your participation grade. You are expected to attend class and to contribute to class discussion.

The capstone assignment (final short story) should demonstrate the degree of improvement you have achieved in the course and will be figured in your final mark.

Following is a description of how grades are derived.

#### **A (4): Consistently exceptional work**

The work is moving toward publishable level. Use of language is concise and precise; figures of speech are imaginative and original; the content is interesting, the approach is fresh, and the form chosen the best possible, every element of fiction engaged with sophistication and elegance. A+ is a grade earned only in very rare instances, by work that is absolutely stellar.

#### **B (3): Consistently good work**

The work is good, above average, but could use more refinement or development, and usually more revision. It shows at least in part a heightened use of language, several striking aspects of imagery or story, and an interesting perspective or point of view. Word choice and description are generally exact and thoughtful.

#### **C (2): Consistently average work**

The work is satisfactory, but relies on ordinary use of language, and is not formally innovative. The writing is competent and shows promise, but definitely needs more work and greater focus. Images or plot are sound but may verge on the clichéd and predictable. Vocabulary is adequate but may be limited.

#### **D (1): Minimal pass**

The work shows some effort but is carelessly constructed and may have grammatical problems. Use of language is undistinguished and clichéd; ideas are ordinary.

#### **F: No Credit**

Work shows no effort; no work has been done at all, or is always late.

The University of Calgary's official four-point Undergraduate Grading System, as described in the Calendar (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/f-2.html>), will be used in this course.

A+/A (4.0); A- (3.7); B+ (3.3); B (3.0); B- (2.7); C+ (2.3); C (2.0); C- (1.7); D+ (1.3); D (1.0); F (0)

Please note that, according to the University Calendar (F.1), instructors may use their discretion when rounding upwards or downwards when the average of term work is between two letter grades.

Although the A+ is solely an honorific that entails no additional points in the four-point system, I employ this mark to distinguish superlative work that exceeds expectations in style, correctness, intellectual depth and breadth, sophistication, and originality.

Late assignments will be penalized with the loss of a third of a grade (an A- to B+) for each business day that the assignment is overdue.

It is expected that you make every effort to hand assignments to the instructor in class. If it is absolutely not possible to do so, take your assignment to SS 1152 and put it in the Dropbox. Your assignment will be date-stamped and placed in the instructor's mailbox. It is your responsibility to keep a copy of all assignments in case of loss by any cause. Assignments cannot be returned by staff in the Department office.

## **V. Guidelines and Policies**

### **Electronic Devices**

We are all at the mercy of social networking, cell phones, text messages and e-mail, but in this class we will need to concentrate on writing.

a) We will be in a wireless-access classroom. You may take notes and work on a laptop in class. If the context is relevant, we may use the Internet to search for a particular item of information together. You are to use this as a tool to accompany the context of what we are learning and discussing. You are not to surf the net, text message your friends, play games, or do assignments for a different class.

b) Cell phones are to be turned off in class.

c) Portable media players, like iPods, are not to be used in class.

d) I check and answer e-mail regularly, usually within 48 hours; however, do not expect me to reply to a query within minutes.

### **Food, Drink, etc.**

Because this is an evening course and a long class, it is understandable that students might feel hungry. Students may drink coffee or water or juice in class, but I would request no consumption of food. Eating in a class like this is distracting and intrusive. We do have a fifteen-minute break in the middle of the class, so if you have low blood sugar and need to consume something, please do so in the break.

## **VI. How to do well in this course**

1. Class attendance is required. You will have difficulty passing this course if you do not attend, if you do not write regularly, and if you do not read your colleagues' work with care and diligence.

2. If you are to make good progress, it is essential that you set aside time for writing every day. It is unwise to try to write a story the night before it is due. Students who work steadily throughout the year perform better than students who binge-write. Special pleading (dry spells or broken fingers) is irritating: writing is a matter of discipline, not excuses. However, if you are ill or are experiencing other difficulties, do let me know so that appropriate consideration can be given to your circumstances.
3. Stories must be double-spaced and must use a clear font so that they can be read easily, either in hard copy or on-line. Students are responsible for supplying electronic copies of their work to their colleagues. You **MUST** give the instructor **TWO** hard copies of each assignment and you must provide two hard copies of your critiques of your colleagues' stories, one for Professor van Herk and one for the author of the text under consideration.
4. This is a course in literary writing, not a course in how to get published or what is trendy (see guidelines on genre writing). We are more concerned with exceptional writing than we are with its marketing.
5. The schedule for this class, as the attached outline makes clear, sometimes varies. A class may be cancelled, but it will always be replaced, if not by a class, then by a literary event. Please let me know if this flexibility creates difficulties for you. Use the schedule to plan and to make effective use of your time.
6. Students often labour under the misguided notion that they do not wish to be "influenced" and that reading outside material or participating in the literary life of the community is not relevant. In fact, literary events provide students with invaluable inspiration and experience. You are expected to attend at least two readings over the course of the year. You are also expected to read widely.
7. Class participation (discussion) is a requirement, part of the graded component of this course.
8. Students will be divided into groups, and each group will have particular deadlines. That deadline is not cast in stone, but if you are late, your work will be discussed last. It is unacceptable to hand in late critiques; these will be penalized.
9. The work that is circulated in the class deserves your full attention. However, it does not deserve the attention of your cousins, roommates, or friends. Please keep your colleagues' work confidential, and treat it with respect, as you would wish your writing to be treated.
10. Work is to be discussed in class with intelligence, using literary terminology. See VI.
11. If you are having difficulties of any kind, or if you have questions, please feel free to meet with me. If you cannot make an appointment during my regular office hours, I am happy to arrange to meet at another time. Do not hesitate to inform me of potential difficulties because I may be able to help you solve them.

## **VII. Guidelines for in-class discussion**

From the language that holds sway in daily conversation, a nuanced vocabulary may seem archaic, but is increasingly desirable. The current reliance on "thing," "you know," and "like" are especial markers of

a lazy tongue. In this class, we will focus on improving your eloquence and wit by moving beyond such limited vernacular. Please take notes on our discussions of oral fixatives, and add your favourites to the list as the year progresses. In terms of evaluative positions and their critical expression, your personal tastes are a less useful benchmark than objective appreciation. When reading any text, the questions you must confront are not whether or not you “liked” the material, but whether it is convincing, effective, and interestingly developed within the story, with reference to literary elements. If you determine that some aspect of the writing works well, explain what and why. And if you feel some aspect of the story does not work well, explain what and why. Abusive or personal comments will not be tolerated.

Learning is about confronting uncomfortable ideas. At some point during this class, we are likely to encounter sensitive material, material that will challenge your thinking or upset your expectations. These challenges are about enhancing your clarity and capacity for critical thinking.

### **VIII. Guidelines for Written Critiques**

The same care and attention holds for the critiques that you will write in response to your colleagues’ stories. Students are expected to read and comment on colleagues’ work with courteous objectivity. As part of your critical acumen, all students are required to write a one-paragraph double-spaced critique in response to every story discussed in class. These written critiques are due on the evening of class discussion; your reading should thus not be a re-hash of what is said in class, but your own carefully thought-out response to the work you have read. Late critiques will be penalized. Critiques should include the name of the piece being analyzed, the author’s name, your name, and the date, with two paper copies, one for Professor van Herk and one for the student whose work is under scrutiny and who will consider your suggestions very seriously.

Critiques should focus on what strikes you, the reader, as the most intriguing element of the writing you have read. They should cover two aspects: what works well and what does not work well, and **why**. Begin with what is effective--always begin positively. Then address what worked least well, and **why**. Critiques should avoid, at all costs, general or self-evident comments, or spurious praise. “I liked this piece,” is not useful or constructive. Critiques should **NEVER** be personal or in any way derogatory--such comments are considered academic misconduct. Students must address the work on the page and **NOT** the writer who has created the material. Nor should critiques consist of hollow praise without substantial editorial comment.

Constructive criticism analyzes both the merits and the flaws of a creative work, the point being to help the writer improve the work. It is a cruel fact that every piece of writing in this class is a work in progress; not one of you will be at a level where you produce perfect or publishable pieces. And every thinking writer must learn to edit and critique his or her work. The more critically a writer can read, the better a self-critic and consequently the better a writer s/he will become. Receiving constructive criticism from careful readers enables every writer to improve his/her writing, and is one of the most useful aspects of this course. As well, in-class discussion of material enables every student to develop his/her critical ability as well as his/her writing. Learning to be a discerning reader is an important step in developing into a better writer, and is a skill that translates from this class into your other courses and your daily life. Critiques will be marked for usefulness, consistency, consideration, skill, literary knowledge, critical acumen, and creativity. They are part of each student’s final grade.

## IX. Making Material Available

You may choose to provide copies of your writing to your classmates in paper form, or you may choose to make copies available in virtual form. We will discuss students' access to technology in your first meeting. Because of the issue of deadlines and because of the requirements of evaluation, you must submit TWO HARD copies of ALL your work to Professor van Herk. Missing work can lead to failure.

### Plagiarism:

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possible suspension or expulsion from the university. Please refer to the following information and make sure you are familiar with the statement below on plagiarism.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-2-1.html>

### Scribe and Muse Club for English Students:

The Scribe and Muse Reading and Writing Club (SMRWC) fosters and champions reading and writing through community service, leadership, and engagement. We strive to enhance the academic and social experience of undergraduate students by promoting academic excellence and interaction between students, faculty, and the community, through social, cultural, and academic events

<http://english.ucalgary.ca/scribe-and-muse-english-club>.

Our email address is [smec@ucalgary.ca](mailto:smec@ucalgary.ca).

### English Department Website:

For more information about courses, programs, policies, events and contacts in the Department of English, please go to our website at <http://english.ucalgary.ca>. Please note that the course outlines posted on the English Department website constitute the official course outline for purposes of appeals. Students should verify any hard copies against this posted version. For courses which employ numerical grades, the official departmental percentage to letter grade conversion scale is also posted on the department website.

### Writing support:

The Student Success Centre offers both online and workshop writing support for U of C students.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

### Guidelines on e-mail Etiquette:

<http://www.enough.utoronto.ca/computeruse/eetiquette.htm>

### Library and Research Support:

Melanie Boyd, Librarian for English, offers research support to students, including strategies for finding articles, books, and other library materials. Contact: [maboyd@ucalgary.ca](mailto:maboyd@ucalgary.ca)

Find *The English Pages* research guide here: <http://libguides.ucalgary.ca/english>

### Follow the Department of English on Facebook & Twitter:



**Academic regulations and schedules:**

Consult the Calendar for course information, university and faculty regulations, dates, deadlines and schedules, student, faculty and university rights and responsibilities. The homepage for the University Calendar is

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/index.htm>

**Grade appeals:**

Consult the following University Calendar link and request advice from the English Department office, SS 1152. Please note that “mere dissatisfaction with a decision is not sufficient grounds for the appeal of a grade or other academic decision.”

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/i.html>

**Deferral of term work and final examinations:**

Should you require an extension for completion of term papers or assignments beyond the deadline of five days after the end of lectures, an Application of Deferment of Term Work form must be completed. The University also has regulations governing the deferral of final examinations. See Calendar:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html>, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>.

**Academic Accommodation:**

It is the students’ responsibility to request academic accommodations. If you are a student with a documented disability who may require academic accommodations and have not registered with Student Accessibility Services, please contact them at 403-220-6019. Students who have not registered with Student Accessibility Services are not eligible for formal academic accommodations. More information about academic accommodations can be found at [www.ucalgary.ca/access](http://www.ucalgary.ca/access).

**Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points:** <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>;

**Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act:** <http://www.ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip/>

**“Safewalk” Program:**

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night: call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot pay booths.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/safewalk/>

**Faculty of Arts Program Advising and Student Information Resources:**

Have a question, but not sure where to start? The new Faculty of Arts Program Information Centre (PIC) is your information resource for everything in Arts! Drop in at SS110, call us at 403-220-3580 or email us at [artsads@ucalgary.ca](mailto:artsads@ucalgary.ca). You can also visit the Faculty of Arts website at <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/undergraduate> which has detailed information on common academic concerns.

For program planning and advice, contact the Student Success Centre (formerly the Undergraduate programs Office) at (403) 220-5881 or visit them in their new space on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of the Taylor Family Digital Library.

For registration (add/drop/swap), paying fees and assistance with your Student Centre, contact Enrolment Services at (403) 210-ROCK [7625] or visit them at the MacKimmie Library Block.



**Contact for Students Union Representatives for the Faculty of Arts:**

[arts1@su.ucalgary.ca](mailto:arts1@su.ucalgary.ca), [arts2@su.ucalgary.ca](mailto:arts2@su.ucalgary.ca), [arts3@su.ucalgary.ca](mailto:arts3@su.ucalgary.ca), [arts4@su.ucalgary.ca](mailto:arts4@su.ucalgary.ca)

**Contact for Students Ombudsman's Office:** <http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds>

**Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI):**

"At the University of Calgary, feedback provided by students through the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI) survey provides valuable information to help with evaluating instruction, enhancing learning and teaching, and selecting courses ([www.ucalgary.ca/usri](http://www.ucalgary.ca/usri)). Your responses make a difference - please participate in USRI Surveys."

## **PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism is an extremely serious offence. Please read the following information carefully. The penalty routinely recommended by the English Department for documented plagiarism is failure of the course in which the offence occurred; academic probation is also routinely applied at the Faculty level. Suspension or expulsion can result from severe or repeated plagiarism.

The University Calendar states:

1. Plagiarism - Essentially plagiarism involves submitting or presenting work in a course as if it were the student's own work done expressly for that particular course when, in fact, it is not. Most commonly plagiarism exists when:

- (a) the work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work (this includes having another impersonate the student or otherwise substituting the work of another for one's own in an examination or test),
- (b) parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author,
- (c) the whole work (e.g., an essay) is copied from another source, and/or,
- (d) a student submits or presents work in one course which has also been submitted in another course (although it may be completely original with that student) without the knowledge of or prior agreement of the instructor involved.

While it is recognized that scholarly work often involves reference to the ideas, data and conclusions of other scholars, intellectual honesty requires that such references be explicitly and clearly noted.

Plagiarism occurs when direct quotations are taken from a source without specific acknowledgement, or when original ideas or data from the source are not acknowledged. Citing your sources in a bibliography is not enough, because a bibliography does not establish which parts of a student's work are taken from other sources. MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation or other recognized forms of citation must be used for this purpose. Advice on adequate documentation can be found at the following web sites:

<http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

### **DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STATEMENT ON PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT**

According to the University Calendar, (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/j.html>)

“The University of Calgary community has undertaken to be guided by the following statements of purpose and values: to promote free inquiry and debate, to act as a community of scholars, . . . , to respect, appreciate, and encourage diversity, [and] to display care and concern for community”. The Department of English, like the university as a whole, is committed to a “positive and productive learning and working environment.”

This environment is characterized by appreciation and encouragement of diversity and respect for the dignity of all persons: students, support staff, and faculty. The department will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour, such as threatening gestures, threatening or abusive verbal or written communication (including e-mails), or any conduct that “seriously disrupts the lawful education and related activities of students and/or university staff”. Any cases of such misconduct should be reported immediately to the department Head, who, depending on the nature and severity of the incident, may then take further appropriate action.